



Meriden
Just Better For Business

City of Meriden, Connecticut
Economic Development Office

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**Testimony
Appropriations Committee
PUBLIC HEARING AGENDA
Friday, March 27, 2009
1:00 PM in Room 2C of the LOB
HB 6363**

In 2002 the City of Meriden embarked on a comprehensive downtown revitalization effort. The private sector and several nonprofit organizations funded the development of a new, master plan for our downtown. This revitalization effort involved all downtown stakeholders – government officials, private businesses, neighborhood organizations, downtown residents and property owners. A second phase of the planning effort focused more specifically on 3 major areas --the City's 15-acre HUB site/ rail station area, Colony Street and West Main Street. This plan was funded by the CTDECD with Urban Act monies.

The downtown HUB/ rail station area is a designated as a stop on the planned New Haven to Springfield commuter rail line. The City has developed designs for an intermodal transit center, a City Center Park and development sites in its Transit Oriented Development Plan for this area. We received \$1.6 million from CTDECD to clear a 15-acre site to make way for the new rail station service. We have also applied to OPM for TOD PILOT funding to further refine of TOD design concepts. The project is a model for the State's Responsible Growth agenda.

I mention these plans, state funding and TOD effort to show that the City and State have been close partners in our goal to remake our downtown. To shutter our downtown courthouse on West Main Street will reverse the progress we have made and negatively impact downtown property owners and businesses.

Meriden's new plans envisioned the West Main Street corridor as a government services and an arts district hub. West Main Street is currently anchored, not only by state offices, but most importantly by our State Courthouse. The people generated by courthouse activity and other state services provide the "feet on the street" needed by downtown coffee shops, restaurants and the emerging retail shops on West Main and on nearby Colony Street. Over the past three years, thanks to the City and State's efforts, West Main and Colony Streets have attracted private developers who have refurbished properties that now house retail, coffee shops, artist housing and local galleries. Other private firms will bring new professional offices and a new restaurant to our downtown within the next 3 months.

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It is evident everywhere that Meriden's downtown is coming back. Our local and state partners have worked long hours and committed funding support to make downtown Meriden a new center of activity and commerce. **This revitalization effort, however, is very fragile. The closing of the State Courthouse on West Main will have a strong, negative impact on our efforts.** The lack of courthouse activity will significantly hurt businesses, severely impeding the progress we have made. We will not only lose the courthouse activity, we will be left with a large vacant structure in the heart of the downtown. This will deter private reinvestment. It makes no sense for the State, our long-term partner in downtown revitalization, to close our courthouse and stymie our downtown renewal.

On behalf of the Economic Development Office of the City, the Greater Meriden Chamber of Commerce, the Meriden Economic Development Corporation, downtown property owners, investors, businesses and Meriden residents, we ask that our courthouse remain open so we can continue to rebuild our downtown.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peggy Brennan", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Peggy Brennan

Economic Development Director

City of Meriden